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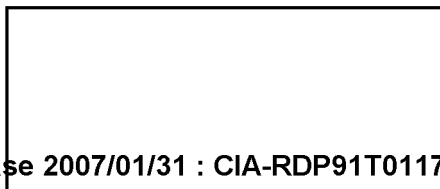
INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

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Office of Current Intelligence

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY



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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communists play only minor role in current Panamanian instability

The Panama Government is highly unstable because (1) President Arosemena is a weak executive with little popular appeal; (2) the presidential candidacy of Antonio Remon for the elections next May is highly controversial; (3) anti-Remon forces are using Communist-linked student groups as one instrument for protesting against the candidacy of a "military" figure, ex-police-chief Remon; and (4) deposed president Arnulfo Arias is maneuvering to get out of jail.

The only apparent Communist contribution to the present instability is participation in a current strike of school and university students. While the strike has led to minor clashes, it has not been supported by mass demonstrations. The student strike began at the end of last October in protest against Remon's candidacy and influence with the administration. The students reportedly are about evenly divided between the anti-administration faction which supports the strike and the opposing pro-administration faction.

The two organizations which appear to be supporting the strike are the Popular Revolutionary Youth and the Patriotic Front. The Popular Revolutionary Youth was formed in October 1950 by the Communist People's Party and, at least prior to the current student strike, was politically unimportant. As of early 1951 this youth group had an estimated membership of 105. There is no evidence that Carlos del Cid, its 25-year-old leader, is under international direction, or that he has ever been outside the Western Hemisphere.

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The Patriotic Front, on the other hand, is important politically. It was formed in 1944 and claims the 7,500 adherents requisite for formation of a Panamanian political party. Its newspaper, controlled by nationalistic, non-Communist Harmodio Arias, is reportedly the most influential in Panama.

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The People's Party is not believed capable of making a major contribution to Panamanian instability. Party membership in recent years has been estimated as approximately 800, but an estimate made in December by the US

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Embassy in Panama gives a figure of only 700.

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The high point of Communist activity in 1951 was the cost-of-living demonstration on 10 July, a Communist-inspired movement with widespread political support. An attempt to repeat the demonstration 20 days later was a failure, however, despite the fact that there was no significant change in the economic situation. Evidence indicates that the failure was caused by exposure of the Communist leadership of the first demonstration.

The present crisis has its origins in the campaign for next May's presidential elections. It began to reach serious proportions when the notoriously corrupt former police-chief Remon was nominated last October, setting off a particularly bitter campaign which has seriously divided the country and which poses a continuing threat to stability. In the event that the government is overthrown, the Communists may attempt to profit from the general disorder, but there is no indication that the party has the potential for playing a significant role in Panamanian politics.

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